

7. STRANGE FIND IN ELEPHANT'S TUSK SOCKET

(With a plate)

On 8.8.65 in the Bolampatti Reserve Forest of Coimbatore District, I shot a declared rogue elephant which had trampled seven people to death and had established a reign of terror in the locality.

It had only the right tusk, the left tusk being completely missing. In the process of removing the right tusk, we also opened the socket of the left tusk (photograph). Stuck in the socket we found three arrowhead-shaped bamboo pieces of about 3 inches each. From about 9 inches from the open end of the socket, we extracted a slightly curved piece of wood, about a foot long and 2 inches in girth (photograph). Further inside reaching almost to the root of the socket were pieces of wood decayed into a soft pulp and dark in colour. There was a large quantity of pus in the socket.

There was no trace of the missing tusk, except for a thin layer of ivory attached to the skull bones.

Obviously the animal was suffering from acute pain and irritation. A probable explanation for the presence of the wood debris in the socket is that to relieve pain the animal must have rubbed its head against tree and bamboo stumps or trunks. Probably the pain and irritation eventually turned him into a rogue.

I also give the story told by the local forest staff and hill tribes. According to them about two years ago they heard a terrific noise and found two tuskers engaged in combat. The fight raged for three days and nights followed by silence on the fourth day. When the hill tribes explored the trampled forest and teak plantation they came upon a dead tusker, obviously killed by the other elephant. They claim that this rogue elephant was the victor. Interesting as the tale is, apart from the missing tusk there was no wound or scar to confirm the story.

We found a number of old gunshot wounds in various stages of healing and one or two in a putrefied condition. In the plate the light-coloured spot at the junction of the front leg and neck marks a festering wound.

Among other identification marks was a deformed left rear leg. All we could find was that this leg was longer than the other. The bones, however, showed no defect when the legs were removed for mounting.

I would like to hear about other such cases if any.

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